



CEREMONY REPORT

SS Young Australian

Roper River, Northern Territory

Monday 23 May 2011

COVER PHOTOGRAPH

The steam tug *Young Australian* moored in Adelaide Harbour (centre, with tall stack) before being purchased to carry out its daring mission of assisting in the delivery of materials for the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line on the Roper River.

State Library of South Australia.

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1 Introduction:

The ceremony for the marking of the **SS Young Australian** with an **ENGINEERING HERITAGE MARKER** was conducted at about 1pm on 23 May 2011 at the Tomato Island Boat Ramp site on the south bank of the Roper River about 7 km west of Ngukurr Aboriginal Community.

Eight people attended the ceremony.

2 Invitations:

The following people were sent invitations for the event:

Hon Gerry McCarthy, Minister for Transport
 Mr Michael Berto, General Manager, Roper Gulf Shire
 Etienne Moller, General Manager, McArthur River Mine
 Mr Jim Grant, Department of Natural Resources, Environment, Art and Sport
 Mr Geoff Brooks, Chief Executive Officer, Katherine Town Council
 Hon Kezia Purick, Member for Goyder, Deputy Leader of the Opposition

Members of Engineers Australia, Northern Division

3. Attendees:

- Kezia Purick, Member for Goyder in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly and Deputy Leader of the Opposition
- Trevor Horman, Chairman of the Northern Division Heritage Committee and Chairman of the National Trust of Australia (Northern Territory)
- Bronwyn Russell, Executive Director, Northern Division, Engineers Australia
- Eddie Webber, Parks and Wildlife Service, Northern Territory Government, Katherine
- Gordon Atkinson, Department of Construction and Infrastructure, Northern Territory Government, Katherine
- Owen Peake, Chair, National Board, Engineering Heritage Australia
- 2 fishermen camped at Tomato Island boat ramp

4 Program & Running Sheet:

No program and Running Sheet.

5 Speech Notes:

No formal speeches were delivered.

6 Ceremony Handout:

No ceremony handout.

7 Press Release:

PRESS RELEASE BY ENGINEERS AUSTRALIA NORTHERN DIVISION

12 May 2011

Engineering Heritage comes to Katherine and Roper Bar

Engineers Australia Northern Division and National Engineers Australia Heritage Division is hosting a plaquing ceremony in both Katherine and Roper Bar.

The first of the ceremonies will be conducted in Roper Bar (on the banks of the Roper River) for the "Young Australian" Paddle Steamer which is the oldest wreck (ships logs indicate 30/12/1872) in the Roper region and the only recorded paddle steamer wreck in the Northern Territory. The Paddle Steamer was integral to the construction of the overland telegraphy. The ship ran aground on a rocky headline in the river from the Telegraph Depot and 6kms upstream from the present-day Aboriginal Community of Ngukurr. Strenuous efforts were made to refloat the Paddle Steamer but the ship was eventually abandoned. Records indicate that the steamer was struck of registration on 25 March 1874.

***more details are available on the "Young Australian" Paddle Steamer by request.*

This week Engineers Australia received a call from a relative of a Master of the "Young Australian" Mr Michael Duff** who provided John Dagwell's obituary which appeared in the 'South Australian Observer' on 19 December 1908. (attached)

John Dagwell (1830-1908) was the brother of Michael's great-great-grandfather Hugh Dagwell (1813-1875) and he noted that John Dagwell was Master of the 'Young Australian' before he entered Marine Board service in 1859.

Michael mentioned that there is a book called 'Journal of the paddle steamer 'Young Australian', James Lowrie Master: from Port Adelaide to Port Darwin, Northern Territory of South Australia, and at the Roper River'. The National Library of Australia in Canberra indicates that there is only one copy of this book available which is held at the Casuarina Campus Library at the Charles Darwin University, although apparently the South Australian State Library holds a microfilm copy.

The second plaquing ceremony will be held in Katherine at the Low Level (Stuart Highway) from 5:00pm. Although the plaque has been in place for some time, this will be the official unveiling of the plaque.

History of the Stuart Highway

The concept and design of the Stuart Highway began in 1870 by the South Australian Government. Between 1911 and 1978 the Commonwealth and various state government departments utilised in house resources and consultants to continue development. The Northern Territory Government took responsibility for construction from 1978.

The highway began in 1870 as a supply track along the Overland Telegraph and over 130 years later, it is now the Stuart Highway as we know it today.

The Stuart Highway North connects Alice Springs with Darwin via numerous small towns and the two major centres of Tennant Creek and Katherine. The explorer John Mc Douall

Stuart, on his third attempt, crossed the continent of Australia from Port Augusta to the north coast arriving 20 miles east of the mouth of the Adelaide River on 24 July 1862. Stuart's Reports spoke highly of the potential of the country that he had traversed and based on Stuart's advice South Australia had the land to its north excised and on 6 July 1863 the Northern Territory became the responsibility of South Australia¹⁴. In 1871 the Overland Telegraph line was constructed linking Port Augusta and the southern states with the recently established settlement of Palmerston. The undersea cable connecting Australia to the world through Java came ashore at Palmerston on Port Darwin. The Overland Telegraph followed the route taken by Stuart for a substantial proportion of its 1765-mile length.

The alignment of the telegraph was kept cleared of trees, maintenance and resupply of stores for the telegraphers at the Repeater Stations, meant that traffic along the route was ongoing and "The Overland" became established. Any Travellers, Drovers, Adventurers & Overlanders crossing the continent followed the Overland Telegraph Line further adding to the development of the road.

The discovery of gold at Tennant Creek in 1934 led to increased traffic from Alice Springs. The road was upgraded to partially gravelled and partially formed in response to the last Australian gold rush. Over the next six years the road north of Tennant Creek was improved, new road alignments pegged and reconnaissance surveys carried out through to Birdum. The desire of the South Australian government to construct a transcontinental railway led to railways being constructed north from Adelaide to Port Augusta in 1878, to Marree in 1884, Oodnadatta in 1891 and Alice Springs in 1929. South from Darwin a railway was built to Pine Creek in 1889, to Emungalan, on the northern bank of the Katherine River, in 1917 and to Birdum in 1929. The alignment of the railways were selected on an engineering basis therefore in the north the railway alignment was different from that of the telegraph. New telephony circuits when installed were constructed along the railway. Past the railheads the track along the telegraph alignment continued to be the route followed by those travelling north or south.

The plaquing ceremony will be followed by a dinner at the Stonegrill, Paraway Motel, Katherine and a technical presentation for the 2011 Engineering Excellence Award (Katherine entrant) from 6:00pm.

All members of the general public are invited to attend all of these events. You can register on line by visiting www.engineersaustralia.org.au/northern/events for all of these events. The plaquing ceremonies have been supported by The Department of Natural Resources, Arts, Environment and Sports, Engineers Australia Northern Division and National Engineering Heritage Division of Engineers Australia, Canberra.

Ends

For more information on the dinner or plaquing ceremonies or dinner please contact:

Bronwyn Russell
Director

Engineers Australia
(08) 8981 4137

Or mobile 0414 894 547

(on the 23rd/24th please use 0409 697713)

Or by email to nt@engineersaustralia.org.au

****Michael Duff has agreed for media contact on**
(08) 8337 9445

Or email hduff@ihug.com.au

8 Press Articles:

8.1 ARTICLE FOR ENGINEERING HERITAGE AUSTRALIA NEWSLETTER

Remote Recognition Ceremony on the Roper

There aren't many places in Australia more remote than the Roper River below Roper Bar. More than 600 km south east of Darwin and nearly 200 km from the Stuart Highway, which runs down the centre of the Northern Territory, there are many flooded creeks to cross at this time of the year and 100 km of dirt road. Mrs Aeneas Gunn called this country the Never Never in her famous book *We of the Never Never*. It is wild and beautiful country.

On 23 May 2011 a small group visited the Tomato Island boat ramp on the south bank of the Roper River about seven kilometres upstream from the Aboriginal Community of Ngukurr on to erect and unveil an interpretation panel and marker for the steam tug *Young Australian*, which was wrecked in the river whilst engaged on the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line in 1872.

The group consisted of Bronwyn Russell, Executive Director of Northern Division; Trevor Horman, Chair of the Northern Division Heritage Group; Owen Peake, Chair of Engineering Heritage Australia and Kezia Purick MLA, Member for Goyder in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly and Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Also on hand were Eddie Weber from Parks and Wildlife Service NT, and Gordon Atkinson from the NT Department of Construction and Infrastructure.

This was an unusual heritage recognition ceremony in that, on arrival the official party dug the post holes, mixed concrete, erected the interpretation panel, placed the concrete and levelled the structure.

The interpretation panel and marker were then unveiled by Kezia Purick and Owen Peake during a brief ceremony followed by a picnic lunch. After lunch some of us borrowed a "tinny" and visited the wreck site 700 metres up the river from the boat ramp. The engine and boiler are still above water level and appear to be in good condition after 140 years in the river. Like all the tidal rivers of the Northern Territory the Roper is home to a thriving population of crocodiles which grow larger and bolder with each passing year. We kept an eye out for crocs but as the experienced bushman Eddie Webber said "It's the one you don't see that gets you".

The steam paddle tug *Young Australian* was purchased by Charles Todd in Adelaide to be used as a tug on the Roper River. Todd had experienced considerable difficulties in construction of the Overland Telegraph line during the Top End Wet Season and the project had fallen seriously behind schedule. Todd decided to establish the Telegraph Depot near Roper Bar 100 km up the Roper River from the

sea. This was successful and materials were transported from the Depot to the telegraph line.

After completion of the telegraph the *Young Australian* was grounded during a towing mishap on 30 December 1872 and could not be re-floated.

The Adelaide to Darwin section of the Overland Telegraph was completed on 22 August 1872. The *Young Australian* story is a testament to the ingenuity and determination of the builders of the Overland Telegraph which reduced the time for communications between Europe and Australia from months to hours.

Trevor Horman

PHOTOGRAPH CAPTIONS

1. The *Young Australian* at the wharf at the Telegraph Depot in 1972. Photo: Northern Territory Library PictureNT

Photo ID: Telegraph Depot Roper River.OT Construction

2. Engine and boiler of the *Young Australian* in the Roper River

Photo ID: 049 Wreck of the Young Australian

8.2 ARTICLE FOR ENGINEERS AUSTRALIA MAGAZINE

Steam Tug *Young Australian* Recognised

A small group made its way to the Tomato Island boat ramp on the south bank of the Roper River about seven kilometres upstream from the Aboriginal Community of Ngukurr (600 km south of Darwin) on 23 May to erect and unveil an interpretation panel and marker for the steam tug *Young Australian*, which was wrecked in the river whilst engaged on the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line in 1872.

The group consisted of Bronwyn Russell, Executive Director of Northern Division; Trevor Horman, Chair of the Northern Division Heritage Group; Owen Peake, Chair of Engineering Heritage Australia and Kezia Purick MLA, Member for Goyder in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly and Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Also on hand were Eddie Weber from Parks and Wildlife Service NT, and Gordon Atkinson from the NT Department of Construction and Infrastructure.

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The steam paddle tug *Young Australian* was purchased by Charles Todd in Adelaide to be used as a tug on the Roper River in the Northern Territory. Todd had experienced considerable difficulties in construction of the Overland Telegraph line during the Top End Wet Season and the project had fallen seriously behind schedule. Todd decided to establish a port at the Telegraph Depot near Roper Bar 100 km up the Roper River from the sea. This was successful and materials were transported from the Depot to the telegraph line. The large and unwieldy cargo ships of the era had great difficulties negotiating the winding tidal river without assistance and the tug overcame this problem.

After completion of the telegraph the *Young Australian* was grounded during a towing mishap and could not be re-floated. The wreck still lies in the river where it grounded.

The Adelaide to Darwin section of the Overland Telegraph was completed on 22 August 1872. The *Young Australian* story is a testament to the ingenuity and determination of the builders of the Overland Telegraph which broke down the time for communications between Europe and Australia from months to hours.

Owen Peake

PHOTOGRAPH CAPTIONS

1. Ceremony attendees around the interpretation panel after the unveiling ceremony at the Roper River. From left to right: Trevor Horman, Kezia Purick, Eddie Webber, Gordon Atkinson, Owen Peake and Bronwyn Russell.

Photo ID: 038 Panel Unveiled 23 May 2011

8.3 ARTICLE FOR NORTHERN DIVISION NEWSLETTER

Heritage Expedition to the Roper

A small group made its way to the Tomato Island boat ramp on the south bank of the Roper River about seven kilometres upstream from Ngukurr on 23 May to erect and unveil an interpretation panel and marker for the steam tug *Young Australian*, which was wrecked in the river in 1872 whilst engaged on the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line between Adelaide and Darwin.

The group consisted of Bronwyn Russell, Executive Director of Northern Division; Trevor Horman, Chair of the Northern Division Heritage Group; Owen Peake, Chair of Engineering Heritage Australia, visiting from Melbourne and Kezia Purick MLA, Member for Goyder in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly and Deputy Leader of the Opposition. Also on hand were Eddie Weber from Parks and Wildlife Service NT, and Gordon Atkinson from the NT Department of Construction and Infrastructure.

Karen Relph from Engineers Australia's Northern Division office also came as far as Mataranka but was sick and was not able to participate in the remainder of the expedition and finished the week in Royal Darwin Hospital.

This was an unusual heritage recognition ceremony in that, on arrival at the site, we selected a site, achieved with Eddie Webber's assistance, dug two post holes, mixed the quick-set concrete, erected the interpretation panel, placed the concrete and levelled the panel. Apart from forgetting to bring a spirit level, which we were able to borrow from one of the considerable group of fishermen camping at the Tomato Island site, the whole operation went without a hitch.

The interpretation panel and marker were then unveiled by Kezia Purick and Owen Peake during a brief ceremony followed by a picnic lunch. Some of us borrowed a boat and motored 700 metres up-river to look at the wreck. Despite being in the river for 140 years the boiler and steam engine appear to be in remarkably good condition.

Owen Peake

About the *Young Australian* and the Overland Telegraph Line

The Steam paddle tug *Young Australian* was purchased by Charles Todd in Adelaide to be used as a tug on the Roper River in the Northern Territory. Todd had experienced considerable difficulties in construction of the Overland Telegraph line during the Top End Wet Season and the project had fallen seriously behind schedule. Todd decided to establish a port at the Telegraph Depot near Roper Bar more than 100 km up the Roper River from the sea. This was successful as materials could be transported from the Depot to the telegraph line north and south from Mataranka. The large and unwieldy cargo ships of the era had great difficulties negotiating the winding tidal river without assistance and the tug overcame this problem. After completion of the telegraph, whilst construction equipment was being recovered from the project, the *Young Australian* was grounded during a towing mishap and could not be re-floated from a rock bar. The wreck still lies in the river where it grounded. The *Young Australian* story is a testament to the ingenuity and determination of the builders of the Overland Telegraph which broke down the time for communications between Europe and Australia from months to hours.

PHOTOGRAPH CAPTIONS

1. Around the interpretation panel after the unveiling ceremony at the Roper River. From left to right: Trevor Horman, Kezia Purick, Eddie Webber, Gordon Atkinson, Owen Peake and Bronwyn Russell.

Photo ID: 038 Panel Unveiled 23 May 2011

2. Young Australian engine in the Roper River

Photo ID: Young Australian engine

NEWS



YOUNG AUSTRALIAN HERITAGE MARKING CEREMONY

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*Article written by Owen Peake
President National Heritage*

8.4 ENGINEERS AUSTRALIA eNEWS - 10 JUNE 2011

NEWS AND NOTICES

Steam tug recognised

An unusual heritage recognition ceremony was held last month at the Tomato Island boat ramp on the south bank of the Roper River about 7km upstream from the Aboriginal Community of Ngukurr, 600km south of Darwin. The official party, there to unveil the heritage marker, first selected a site, dug post holes, mixed concrete, erected the interpretation panel, placed the concrete and levelled the structure.

Once the concrete had set, the official party then proceeded to officially unveil the panel and marker, with Kezia Purick, member for Goyder in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly and deputy leader of the Opposition, and Owen Peake, chair of Engineering Heritage Australia, doing the honours.

The marker commemorates the steam tug *Young Australian*, which was wrecked in the river while engaged on the construction of the Overland Telegraph Line in 1872.

In attendance at the ceremony were Bronwyn Russell, executive director of Northern Division; Trevor Horman, chair of the Northern Division Heritage Group; Eddie Weber from Parks and Wildlife Service NT; and Gordon Atkinson from the NT Department of Construction and Infrastructure.



Ceremony attendees around the interpretation panel were (l-r) Trevor Horman, Kezia Purick, Eddie Weber, Gordon Atkinson, Owen Peake and Bronwyn Russell.

9 Letters of Thanks:

Letters of thanks were sent to the following on 7 August 2011:

Trevor Horman
Kezia Purick
Gordon Atkinson
Eddie Webber
Owen Peake

10 Interpretation Panel:

The interpretation panel was erected at Tomato Island Boat Ramp. The panel is 1200 mm wide and 600 mm high and is constructed using 3M Class 2 reflective vinyl film mounted on a 2.4 mm aluminium substrate. The panel is mounted on a steel fabricated frame fixed into the ground with concrete footings. A standard EHA marker disc 300 mm diameter is affixed to the cross-bar. The frame is finished in black powder coated finish.

YOUNG AUSTRALIAN

The Young Australian

The Young Australian was a 58-ton side-wheel paddle steamer capable of towing the original merchant ships of the day up and down the winding tidal Roper River between the Roper Mouth and the Telegraph Depot.

The ship was built at Blackwall, London in 1853. She was 29 metres long and 5 metres wide, constructed of wood with a single mast. She was rigged for sailing in favourable conditions.

The 40-horsepower steam engine which powered the Young Australian was of a type known as a side-lever engine, popular in the early days of steam ships, as it placed the centre of gravity of the engine low in the hull just the motor shaft was high on the engine, at a suitable height for direct coupling to the paddle wheels. In this type of engine the drive from the top of the cylinder to the crankshaft was via a pair of 'side levers' or beams mounted low at each side of the engine (see diagram).




The engine of the Young Australian

The Wreck Of The Young Australian

On 30 December 1872 the ship ran aground on a rocky headland in the river 20 km downstream from the Telegraph Depot and 6 km upstream from the present-day Aboriginal Community of Ngatjan. Serious efforts to lighten the load and refloat the ship were made but proved unsuccessful and the ship was eventually abandoned.

The Young Australian remains in the Roper River today. Her wooden hull gradually rotted away leaving only her engine and boiler above water level. The Young Australian is the oldest wreck in the Roper River and the only recorded paddle steamer wreck in Northern Territory waters.



Remains of the Young Australian engine in the Roper River. Photo: Trevor Horman



The boiler and engine of the Young Australian beside a small island in the Roper River. Photo: Trevor Horman

Sir Charles Todd

Sir Charles Todd was an outstanding astronomer, meteorologist and electrical engineer who showed remarkable leadership and great skill throughout his long working life.


He was born in London in 1826 and arrived in Adelaide in 1855 to take up the post of South Australian Government Astronomer and Superintendent of Telegraphs, a post which he retained until his retirement in 1896.

He married Alice Todd in 1855, just before departing for Australia. Alice lives on in Australia's collective memory as the given name to Alice Springs.

The greatest of Todd's life works was the Overland Telegraph Line, however he was also responsible for telegraph lines from Adelaide to Melbourne, Sydney and many South Australian regional towns.

Todd can arguably claim to be the first systematic meteorologist in Australia. He arranged for weather data to be telegraphed daily from around South Australia to Adelaide.

Todd was knighted in 1893 and died on 29 January 1903 in Adelaide.



Sir Charles Todd. Photo: State Library of South Australia



Overland Telegraph Line workers at the Telegraph Depot wharf, Roper River with the tug Young Australian moored behind them. Photo: Northern Territory Library Picture 877

The Overland Telegraph Line

In October 1870 the UK Parliament approved the building of the Overland Telegraph Line between Darwin and Adelaide and appointed Charles Todd to carry out the work. Todd had 15 months to plan and construct 3758 km of telegraph line which involved erecting 36,000 poles.

By the end of 1871 the southern and central sections had been completed leaving a gap between Tennant Creek and Katherine of 634 km. Work was impossible during the wet season but Todd had a deadline to meet and had to take urgent action to complete the line.

An Alternative Route To The Inland

Todd established a depot on the Roper River east of present-day Matimbula. Materials and manpower were brought up the Roper River by ship, offloaded at the Telegraph Depot then moved along the line by bullock teams.

While the Roper River was navigable up to Roper Bar, about 160 km from its mouth, it was a dangerous and difficult journey for large ships. What was needed was a tug to tow ships. Todd purchased the Young Australian for this purpose.

The Overland Telegraph Completed

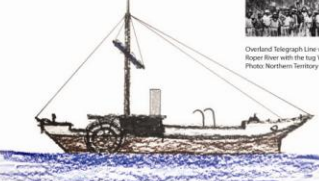
By May 1872 work was able to recommence with a construction crew of over 300 men. On 22 August 1872 the wires of the northern and southern ends of the line were connected at Frew Ponds completing the telegraph circuit between Darwin and Adelaide.

The exchange of messages between Adelaide and London had to wait. The British and Australian telegraph company cable to Indonesia had failed and was not repaired until 22 October 1872, ending the communications isolation of Australia from Europe for all time.

MAY 2011

The Young Australian is a declared Heritage Place under the Northern Territory Heritage Conservation Act.

The sketch shows the presumed layout of the Young Australian based on the limited historical information.



Proudly supported by

11 Photographs:



Official Party with interpretation panel after ceremony 23 May 2011. From left, Trevor Horman, Kezia Purick, Eddie Webber, Gordon Atkinson, Owen Peake, Bronwyn Russell.



Mixing concrete for setting the interpretation panel. From left: Trevor Horman, Eddie Webber, Gordon Atkinson.



Placing concrete. Gordon Atkinson and Eddie Webber.



The *Young Australian* interpretation panel and marker after unveiling.



Kezia Purick placing her thumb print in the Sands of Time.



Roper River at Tomato Island Boat Ramp. The wreck of the *Young Australian* is 700 metres upstream (to the left).



The engine and boiler of the *Young Australian* on the day of the unveiling. Note that the water level is higher, particularly noticeable around the engine, than in earlier photographs due to the higher river flows this year.



The boiler of the *Young Australian* on the day of the unveiling.

OWEN PEAKE

**Honorary Member of Northern Division Engineering Heritage Committee
With responsibility for the *Young Australian* Marking**

11 August 2011

CHANGE CONTROL

VERSION 1	6 June 2011	Adapted from Sale Swing Bridge Ceremony Report
VERSION 2	24 June 2011	Further refinement
VERSION 3	11 August 2011	Further additions from Karen Relp
VERSION 4	12 August 2011	Furtherrefinements